



Shop Smart for Back to School

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Media Contact: Jerad Albracht, 608-224-5007
Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – The end of August means picnics, swimming pools and last minute fishing trips for many Wisconsin families. For those with children in kindergarten through grade 12, late August also signals the “back to school” shopping season. To make sure you get your money’s worth, take these tips from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) along with your shopping list.

“A recent national survey found that the average family will spend nearly \$690 this year on back to school shopping,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. “With that much money on the line, it is important for shoppers to plan ahead for their needs and to keep a close eye on their receipts to ensure that they are getting the advertised prices for their purchases.”

The majority of a family’s back to school spending is expected to go toward clothing, followed by electronics and school supplies. Retailers will likely offer a number of seasonal discounts and promotions over the next weeks to entice consumers. Before visiting a store, make sure to closely review the company’s advertisements for restrictions involving quantities, returns or rain checks.

Follow these simple tips to ensure that you are charged the right price for your purchases:

- Bring a copy of the store ads with you. Having the ability to “cross shop” using multiple fliers will be beneficial.
- Write down prices or special sales while you shop to have a better sense of the final total before you hit the register. Most pricing errors occur on sale items.
- Keep an eye on the display screen while your items are being scanned. Speak up if you think you have been overcharged for an item.
- Stores are required to charge the lowest advertised price.
- If there is a pricing error, Wisconsin law requires that a store refund any overcharge amount. Work with customer service to receive a refund while you are in the store. Double check your receipt before you leave to ensure that the totals are correct.
- Ask about a store’s pricing error policy. In addition to refunding the overcharge, some stores give bonuses as a customer service gesture.
- Report pricing errors to state or local inspectors. To file a weights and measures complaint with DATCP’s Weights and Measures Bureau, send an e-mail to datcpweightsandmeasures@wi.gov or call 608-224-4942.

Every year, DATCP’s Weights and Measures team visits stores statewide to test for price accuracy, and the results show that consumers pay correct prices at Wisconsin stores an overwhelming majority of the time. In 2013, DATCP inspectors tested more than 42,000 items for price accuracy, and found that nearly 99% of the time prices were accurate or registered in the consumers’ favor. Even so, it doesn’t hurt to keep these back-to-school shopping tips in mind during this busy shopping season.

For additional information, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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